

Essential Tennis Podcast #85

Welcome to the Essential Tennis Podcast. If you love tennis and want to improve your game, this podcast is for you. Whether it technique, strategy, equipment or the mental game. Tennis professional Ian Westermann is here to make you a better player. And now here's Ian!

Ian : Hi and welcome to the Essential Tennis Podcast. Your place for free expert tennis instruction that can truly help you improve your game.

Today's episode of the essential tennis podcast is brought to you by Summersetsportsperformance.com.

Thank you very much for joining me on today's show and episode number 85 is going to be kind of a grab bag of listener questions. And we're going to be covering such topics as how to serve and deal with the sun. When the sun is shinning into your face and into your eyes. We'll also going be talking about the mentality of playing somebody who is better than you. Playing against an opponent who's clearly a better player than you are.

Before we get to that, real quickly I want to let you guys know a way that you can help me and Essential Tennis, if this podcast has aided in the advancement of your game or if any part of essential tennis has helped you. I'd really appreciate you returning the favor a little bit by helping me spread the word about the show and about the website.

And you can do that by signing up for a free promotional packet from myself. And that packet consist of fliers and informational cards and also essential tennis stickers as well. And this packet will be sent you completely free no matter where in the world you are and I'd really appreciate your help by handing this things out. If you have players that you typically play with, maybe even opponents, teammates, team, practice partners, that sort of thing ... stickers, you know, the cards.

Maybe the facility that you typically play at if you wouldn't mind putting up a flier about essentialtennis.com. There are all ways that you can help me spread the word out to other, you know, really really passionate tennis enthusiasts about the website.

So you can sign up for this materials by going to the front page of essential tennis. Com and click on the large banner there that is talking about the promotional packets. Just fill out your address and your name and I'll get those out to you quickly.

Alright, lets get down to business. Sit back, relax and get ready for some great tennis instruction. [music] [music]

Alright, the first question that I'm going to tackle today comes to us from James in England. James, thank you very much for writing. He wrote to me and said, "As a relative novice to the game, I only started playing last October. I am really struggling when I have top serve into the sun. I have found various tips on the internet, such as wearing sun glasses, wearing a cap, experimenting with different serving positions on the baseline and altering the ball toss. Well some of things have helped, I still feel I'm doing something fundamentally wrong."

"A lot of the time I will toss the ball up, but then as I go to serve, all I can see is the glare of the sun. It then is as much as I can do to make good contact usually and this results in a feeble serve and my eyes often remain dazed, while I play out the assuming point. It amazes me how well the pros seem to deal with the sun often without sun glasses, caps, and seemingly unaffected by the overhead sun. Can you help explain how i should tackle this problem correctly and maybe offers some tips, practice drills, etc?"

Well, James, I got to tell you, you already outlined pretty well a ll the typical ways of dealing with the sun during your tennis playing and specifically the serve.

Usually the overhead and the serve are the two shot that are most often affected by the sun and kind of having that glare or just making it difficult to see in general. But it sounds that you've already done a good amount of research yourself and you've come up with a lot of the most common ways that people try to deal with this problem.

Now, this is the problem that I personally have never really had. I've played a lot of tennis, a lot of tennis outside, and certainly there are times where it's more of a problem than others. You know, if it's a cloudy day out you don't really have to worry about the sun at all. You can just be relax regardless of the side that you're serving from but there are times when you're playing mid-day when the sun really can be, kinda right in the way. Kinda right where you like to put your toss. And that can definitely serve as a problem.

[05:00]

Now this is something that I've always just kind of dealt with and I used some of the strategies that you've talked about to be able to make it a little bit more easy to deal with it. Now as you pointed out, the Pro's almost never wear glasses. There are , there are couple exceptions to that.

One of them is Clemont. He will often times wear sunglasses when he's outside. Also Tipsarevic, he likes to wear sunglasses outside and sometimes inside will wear glasses with clear lenses. He's definitely unique in that way. But those are really the only two players that come to mind-- modern players that wears sunglasses at all.

It's just something that the Pros don't do because it gets in the way. However, you know, however well designed your sunglasses are, they still give, you know, there is still a barrier there between your eyes and the ball, and the racket and your opponent. And so, while good sunglasses can certainly not be in the way as much, it still alters your perception a little bit.

Now when I go outside and teach, I wear sunglasses when I'm outside for long periods of time. Just because it's easier on my eyes and it, you know, I want my eyes to last as long as possible. And a lot of times I'm spending, you know, six to eight hours outside teaching and it's just easier for me to have sunglasses on and a hat.

But when i go out to compete; I don't wear a hats. I don't wear sunglasses because it just gets in the way. Now the sun specifically is something that really, James, you just kinda have to learn how to deal with. And I'll go over the different suggestions that you gave or that you've tried to fix this problem real quickly for other listeners that maybe haven't heard of these fixes.

The ball toss is something that you can change and you can really try a lot of different things depending on exactly where the sun is. You can try tossing a little more to the right or to the left. Or maybe even a little bit lower, and quicken your motion up a little bit so you don't have to look up quite as long.

This are all things that I've done-- adjustments that I've made when the sun is really just in the wrong spot and it's just right dead when you're trying to look.

Stance you can change. You can rotate your body a little more or a little bit less if the sun, you know, directly in front of you or directly behind you. That's an adjustment you can make. And also you can stand on a little different place on the baseline. You can move out to the right or to the left along the baseline. Maybe there's a shadow on half of the court. Or even just half of the deuce half of the courts. And you can make an adjustment--stand a little bit on that side so that you have a a protected place on the courts. Then of course we've got the hat and the glasses as well. So there's five different ways that you can try to deal with it.

And James says that he's tried all of them but still has problems dealing with it. To be honest with you James, at that point, now that we've discussed all of those different ways and hopeful fixes. At that point I'm really out of suggestions for you. And that could be the first time I've ever said that on the podcast but it's something that I personally have always just.. . it's just a matter of fact type of thing. I mean it's the sun, you have to deal with it. Your opponent has to deal with it. Everybody who's out there on the court at that time of day is dealing with it. And it's something that you just have to find the best way to remedy the problem for yourself.

There are people whose eyes are more sensitive than others so I'm not trying to say that, you know, you're being a cry baby or anything like that. Or that you just need to kind of buck up and deal with it. But on the other hand, you kinda do a little bit. [laughter]

Like i said, some people, their eyes are just more sensitive. I would suggest, James, going to the forums at essentialtennis. Com. Go sign up for the forums and make a post. The best section of the forums to post this in would probably be under, probably technique, or maybe general discussion. And I would post and ask the other members that we have. We have over three hundred members at the forums now. Ask them for feedback, because to be honest with you this is something I haven't dealt with a lot.

I called Royce and talked to him about it actually. Because I didn't just want to come back empty handed and tell you to just deal with it. He said that he has dealt with the sun, and he's a little bit more on the sensitive side. But for him it's something that he's just had to put up with.

And so, there you go. [laughter]

[10:00]

I don't want say that was the least helpful segment I've ever done on the show but it sounds that you've probably got most of the fixes nailed down and it's something you're going to have to probably come up the combination of those different remedies and just do your best out there James. It's not something that's always easy, but there's a lot of those types of things in tennis where, you know, it doesn't come easy but you're going to have to deal with it and learn how to best work around with it yourself.

So James, best of luck to you with that and I hope to see you on the forums. Ask around there and I'm sure you'll get a lot of feedback from other players that are right around your level and hopefully who have dealt with the same issues and maybe have some unique fixes that I haven't heard about it yet. But best of luck to you and I hope that you find a good fix. [music]

Alright, next up we have two questions that have come to us from Francois in Canada, and Francois has written to me a couple of times-- he and I have exchanged emails. And Francois I really appreciate your passion for the game and your enthusiasm. I'm sorry if not always able to respond fully to all your emails. He sent me some really long emails about his, you know, his recent experiences with the game of tennis as he continues to try to improve himself.

And it's always fun to hear stories about that from listeners so I appreciate those emails, Francois. And hopefully I can help you here with the couple of questions that you have.

And his first question to me is very simple, but has a lot of underlying elements to it. His first question to me was simply: "Hi Ian, do you have suggestions on how to play against a better ranked player. " That's it.

Well, great question. I've got four different tips for you here Francois to help you deal with playing against somebody better. And in his next question he gets more specific about playing against a higher level player and we're going to get more practical in terms of the actual experience or choice between playing against somebody who's maybe a little bit lower level or somebody who's higher level.

But to answer this question here, I'm going to be talking more about kinda mental tennis issues having do to with going up against somebody who is better than you, you know, kinda being honest with ourselves here. And saying that we know that this opponents has more experienced. They typically play against a higher level of competition than us. And, you

know, when you go out and play any sport this is going to happen. You're going to play teams that are worse than you.. Or opponents that are worse than you, You're going to play opponents that are better than you and it's good to admit that. [laughter]

It's good to be honest. Sometimes those of us who are more competitive have a hard time admitting that to ourselves. But it's good Francois that you understand that there are players out there who are just plain better than you.

And it's good to go in with the right mentality. So I've got four different things here. Four different suggestions or ways that I want you to think about this. And the first one is, please understand that there is no pressure on you at all. And in my outline I put AT ALL in caps. There should be no pressure on you. And this is important to understand. A lot of times lower to mid level tennis players go out to play this type of match against somebody who is obviously a level above where they typically play, and they put the pressure on themselves to go out there and play big. To go out there and play the best tennis of their lives, you know, the highest they've ever played in their entire tennis career and they feel like, if they don't go out there and just play lights out, that it's going to be a complete failure and they will be embarrassed. And it's going to be a waste of time for their opponents etc..

Well, [laughter] understand this Francois and everybody else listening. If you're playing somebody who's clearly a level above you, they know this as well and to be honest, you know, let's be upfront about it. They are probably expecting a relatively easy match here. So don't put the pressure on yourself to go out there and be amazing and play the best tennis you've ever played in your life. Understand that he is supposed to win. Put that in quotation marks, you know, "he is supposed to win".

That doesn't mean that they are going to win every single time. Obviously upsets happens everyday of the week. But on paper, accepts the fact that he or she is suppose to beat you and accept the fact that you are supposed to lose. And I think it's important to put that on to open and kind of air that out and accept that. Now, there's a fine line between accepting that and being able to play freely and without pressure on yourself. Without putting the.. The pressure on yourself mentally to have to go out there and play the best tennis of your life. There's a difference between having that freedom and understanding that he is on paper the better player-- he's supposed to win.

[15:00]

There's a difference between that and having a defeatist mentality and walking out there and saying "wow this is a waste of time. He's going to crush me. I shouldn't even be out here on the court with him. You know, this is really embarrassing." [laughter]

So this can be difficult mentally, but I don't want you to walk out there negative about the situation and say to yourself, "wow this really is dumb. I shouldn't be out here with this player." But, on the other hand, don't be nervous and put so much pressure on yourself to have to play amazing.

We want to be somewhere in the middle. Be realistic about it. Be honest with yourself and realize that this person is better than you. But don't be negative about it either. And that can be difficult depending on your personality type. I personally, I'm very much a perfectionist in my own tennis game. So when I go out and I play somebody in the past anyway, when I go out and I played somebody who is obviously better than me, I really expect to win anyway.

And, you know, deep down inside I know I have, you know, these great skills. I know I have a great game etc.. And I know that if I play absolutely perfect, that it's possible I could win and yet when I don't win, even when I wasn't supposed to, I get really frustrated with myself and really down on myself and negative even though I wasn't expected to win anyway.

So, those are the two main mental traps that you can fall into Francois. Don't be overly optimistic and think, wow, you know, I'm going to try as hard as possible. I'm going to win anyway. Not that it's impossible for you to win, but don't be negative either. So, that's my number one suggestion to you.

Number two. Given that first understanding, that there's really no pressure on you to win. Given that understanding. Go out there and do play your A game and be relaxed and be confident. And that ties in with not putting so much pressure on yourself. And don't go out there nervous and thinking, wow, this guy's going to crush me. Be relaxed. Understand that, I'm not supposed to win this match so, be loose and kinda have fun and enjoy and try to enjoy it.

Enjoy the fact that you get to go out there, get to play tennis. Enjoy your surroundings. Enjoy having a good workout. Go out there and have a good time. Because don't worry about it. You're not supposed to beat this player. So don't put all the pressure on yourself to have to play perfectly. And again don't be negative about it either. Just go out there. Come out with the strong game plan. Come out onto the court knowing what your strengths are and what your

weaknesses are. Try to play your strengths as much as possible. And just be relax and enjoy it as much as you can.

So, that's the second suggestion.

Number three. Expect to be challenged and expect to be out-hit sometimes. Expect to be over-powered sometimes. And don't be frustrated when that happens. Don't be frustrated when you go out there and your opponent does take you to the wood shed a couple of times.

Maybe your opponent will play extremely well that day and beat you 6-0, 6-0. Even though you played well, try your best not to be frustrated by that and expect to be challenged. Expect that your opponent will play well. Don't be negative about the situation. And as I mentioned a couple of minutes ago, that this is something that I often struggle with even when playing against somebody who I know is better than me. And I know should beat me. I still get frustrated when they do.

And actually, it sounds kinda crazy now that I say it out loud but I tend to be a little bit of a perfectionist. And I'm not sure which personality type you are Francois but I'm just laying that out there as plainly as I can.

When they do play well and they do play to their potential against you, don't be frustrated about it. Just do your best and continue to fight. And my third.. I'm sorry my fourth and last suggestion to you-- pay close attention to what's going on and learn as much as possible. And you need to understand, be positive about this environment and treat it as a learning environment. Don't think that it's a waste of time and this goes back to that other personality type-- maybe being negative about it and saying "Wow, this is a waste of my time. This is a waste of my opponents time. Nobody's going to get anything out of this. " That's not true. You can take a lot from this experience by playing somebody who's even much better than you. You get to learn, you got the privilege of being out there against somebody who's worked maybe longer than you or harder than you. Who has maybe taken more lessons than you.

You get the privilege to be on the court with somebody like that who's at the next level-- the next level that you want to be at. And if you pay close attention and you watch what they do and you take some mental notes along the way, you can come off the court a smarter player and you can come off the court with information about what you need to do to bring yourself to that level. And this can be very valuable information.

[20:00]

If you just go back and forth from deuce side to ad side, kind of sulking and feeling sorry for yourself and negative-- and in a bad attitude. You're not going to learn a thing. Your opponent is just going to crush you. You're going to walk off the court and go home angry. And it will be a waste of time because you've convinced yourself that it would be.

So, go out there with a good positive attitude, pay close attention to what's going on in the match and you can learn a lot on about what you need to do to bring yourself to the next level. And that's very valuable. That's very valuable information.

So, Francois, hopefully that outline is helpful to you and I'll go over those again real quickly just to wrap up.

Number one. Understand that there's no pressure on you to win AT ALL.

Just don't worry about winning and losing. You should just be going out there with a neutral attitude about it. Don't put too much pressure on yourself but don't be too negative either.

Number two. After understanding that. Go out there and play your A game. Play your strengths, be relaxed and be confident. Just do the best that you can with the weapons that you have.

Number three. Expect to be challenged. Expect that you're going to get out hit part at the time, and don't be frustrated by this if you're not successful. Remember suggestion number one. You're probably going to get beat. You're suppose to get beat.

And number four. Pay close attention and learn as much as you can. Don't be negative and sulk around and waste your time. By the way that wastes your opponents time as well. That's really the only way that you're going to waste their time. And I get this attitude a lot from students when they know they're going up against somebody who is better than them. They

will want to go out with a negative attitude and say, Wow, this is really a waste of their time and then it will be because you don't give yourself a chance to play well.

When you go out there and you fight as hard as you can, even when it's not good enough and your opponent is still better than you, they'll still respect you for that and it's not a waste of their time-- it was good practice for them to even play somebody who's a level below them.

But if you go out there being negative and you hang your head, and you have a poor attitude. Well, they're not going to enjoy being out there with you and at that point, yeah, you're disrespecting them. You're disrespecting yourself and you are wasting your time. So, just be careful with that.

So Francois, if I could help you with that any further let me know. But thanks very much for the great question and good luck with that. And good luck playing with those players that are better than you. That can be tough to do. [music]

And next up we've got another question from Francois.

And this is a similar type of topic but it's different. You guys will see what I mean once we start getting in to my answer. Francois wrote to me in an email and told me about his recent experience where he's playing in league play.

And he started off, he's played for about four years now. And just recently he got bumped up from a 3.0 league to a 4.0. And starting about a year ago, he was in a 3.0 league. He was comfortable there. He started spending a lot of time on his game and taking lessons. And he got two strong for that league and they bumped him up.

And here's what he says about his current experiences. "I lost my first two matches and I'm desperate. All these new players have heavier strokes and have more consistency than I do. I started to play four years ago. I am thirty seven years old but still progress a lot as I am curious and enthusiastic. But most of them have played for the last twenty years. "

"So their consistency is much better than mine. It's not easy to change level. I will continue to listen to your podcast, watch videos and practice to get better so I can adjust my play to face

these new players but I feel inconsistent at this new level and against these better opponents that's not a good thing. Do you have any suggestions?"

Well, Francois, I can totally relate with the where you're coming from. When I was in college, when I first started out, my freshmen year I didn't make my college team. And I was crushed by that. I really had high hopes for making my college team my freshmen year. I tried to walk on to the team but I wasn't quite good enough and that motivated me a lot.

[25:00]

I worked really hard that year and I made the team my sophomore year, my second year of college. I made the team but I was the bottom of the line up. And so, I got into the team practices. And every single person was better than me. [laughter] And so I know this feeling to go out there and see a whole new level of play and to have to do your best to try to deal with it and kinda catch up quickly.

Now let me give you some suggestions here on how to deal with this. First of all, there's two main reactions that you can have to be thrown into this situation. You can either be frustrated and have your feelings hurt, and go back and play the weaker players again. That's option number one.

If maybe your ego can't take losing and getting beat by these stronger opponents so the easy way out is going to be for you to just go back and play against the 3.0 players again. Your second option is to use it to motivate yourself to improve your game again. You went through about a year where you worked hard at your game and it sounds like you probably made a jump up from a 3.0 player to 3.5 and that's great.

And then they threw you into a 4.0 league and now you're playing players that are even one step above that. Well, you're going to have to use this as a positive. Use it to motivate you, when you go out there and play these better players. Watch what they do, learn from them and then go out, take lessons, listen to this podcast, improve yourself and you're going to have to keep building yourself up one bit at a time.

Number two. I've got four things for you here, that's number one.

You're going to choose which way you're going to go with this. Number two, this is your opportunity to jump up in level again. This is a big opportunity. Not everybody gets the chance to be the bottom player in a league or in a play group or whatever. Maybe that doesn't sound like that beneficial of a thing. Why would I want to be the weakest player?

Well because this is a huge opportunity for you to improve because you get to see these better players week after week, match after match. You'll have no choice but to improve your game. This is the big opportunity for you to hopefully get one step closer to your fullest potential as a tennis player.

So, don't be negative about it. Take the opportunity and run with it. That's number two.

Number three. Understand that the jump from 3.0 to 3.5 is a much easier transition than 3.5 to 4.0. And 3.5 to 4.0 is easier than 4.0 to 4.5. So, you may have worked really hard for a year to get from 3.0 to 3.5. Understand that this would probably take some more work. And expect it to take work and expect it to take time and expect it to take time and expect that it's going to take some focus and concentration.

Don't think that it's going to be easy. It's not going to be. And it kind of goes back to my first point. So you're going to have to decide here what you're going to do. Are you going to be frustrated and go back and start playing the players you know you can beat again? Or are you going to use this to help motivate yourself; work hard and make that next jump in level.

Lastly, just some encouragement for you. Don't give up. Don't give up Francois. This is a great opportunity for you and you need to use this to help improve your game. Don't get frustrated.

Sometimes you will, and that's fine. I understand. I know what it is like to go out and be the weakest player and to have everybody kinda beat up on you. But just understand that this is your opportunity to move up in level. Take it, run with it and do the best you can and your game will keep on improving as long as you're focused and you keep on working at it and you keep your attitude relatively good as you keep on working hard.

So, that's my advice for you Francois. Best of luck to you and I'm really proud of you. I'm happy that you're making that jump. I'm happy that you've made that transition up to a higher

level of play. Don't be frustrated. Keep working hard and you'll make another jump up in level again hopefully sometime in a near future.

Keep letting me know how you do. [music] [music]

And that does it for this episode of the Essential Tennis Podcast -- Episode # 85. To wrap up the show today I'd like to do a couple of shout out to Essential Tennis listeners. And these will be just some kind of fun mentions of listeners. Some words of encouragement or thanks. And my first one is to a poster of the forums at essential tennis.com. Mark in San Diego and Mark was talking on the forums about how he's been working hard at his fitness and since June he's lost 38 pounds.

[30:00]

June, July, August, September so. Last 3 or 4 months, he lost 38 pounds, that is awesome Mark. And he says tennis-wise, "I'm definitely faster around the court. My back does not hurt as much after a few hours of tennis. My knees also do not ache nearly as much. I started the two-handed back hand about a year ago due to tennis elbow and I'm now able to rotate into my shot much better with my smaller stomach. I used to be considered fast for somebody who was heavy and nearly 50, it is fun to be considered fast for somebody who is nearly 50 and without the heavy caveat."

Well, Mark, I'm really proud of you and one of my favorite TV shows is "The Biggest Loser". I love watching that show, it's truly inspirational. I love seeing people changed their lives and be inspired and lose lots of weight and get healthier. Get more healthy is probably the better way of saying it.

But anyway, Mark, great job-- keep up the good work. He's got a little bit of weight to go, he says, before he reaches his goal, but I'm really proud of what you've done so far. Keep it up.

Next up, we have Adrian in the Philippines, who's a new listener, and wrote and said, "Hi, Ian. I just found out about your site last week. I have already downloaded 10+ podcast files. Thanks very much for your hard work and keep it up!"

Adrian, I'm always happy to hear from new listeners,, and especially from different parts of the world, and new parts of the world. I think you might be my... The first person I've heard from in the Philippines. So, I wanted to give you a shout out and thanks very much for being a new listener.

Hopefully the show continues to help you. Let me know if you have any questions about your own game. And lastly, last shout out for today's show is Shelley, who came to the first Essential Tennis Clinic, and is a great poster and contributor at the forums, as well.

Shelly just last week began a monthly subscription donation to Essential Tennis. Ten bucks a month and Shelly I really appreciate that a lot. Thank you. That really helps me continue to work on the site. Doing the website is certainly not free and I still don't have any actual products up on the website. I will eventually besides doing clinics on the future, I plan on doing more clinics as well.

But in the meantime people who donate to me and you know, give me a couple of dollars here and there, really helped me a great deal in paying for the hosting fees and paying for work that gets done on the site. Whenever there is a new section that goes up, that's something that's not free. So, Shelly thank you very much for supporting me and everybody else who sends in donations as well.

It's always greatly appreciated. A lright, that does it for this weeks show.

Take care everybody and good luck with your tennis. [music] [empty]